

## **Fighting Against the Current: The Pursuit of Nuclear Arms Control in the Coming Year**

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Let me begin by recognizing the “elephant in the room” – Donald Trump. Last May, America’s president announced that the U.S. would pull out of the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and six other states. Five weeks ago, Trump announced that the U.S. would withdraw from the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty. In recent weeks, North Korea has made obvious that Trump’s depiction of Kim Jung-un’s agreement to de-nuclearize North Korea was greatly exaggerated. And the Trump administration continues to stall on President Putin’s invitation to extend the 2010 New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty when it expires in 2021.

It is obvious that President Trump is at least partly responsible for the perilous position of nuclear arms control as we approach the end of 2018. He is both ignorant of the subject and disinterested in learning; he instinctively rejects the concept of shared interests with other nations; he dismisses any agreement negotiated by his predecessor; and he has now placed the National Security Council under the malign influence of arms control skeptic John Bolton.

But Trump-bashing aside, I want to step back and mention some underlying, “pre-existing conditions” that are relevant to the question of enhancing mutual security through arms control.

Vladimir Putin made a serious error in rejecting President Obama’s offer to follow up New START with an additional 1/3 reduction in the level of U.S. and Russian nuclear forces. Instead of tightening future constraints, Putin apparently authorized the testing and deployment of a new missile banned by the INF Treaty, undermining a regional balance of U.S. and Russian nuclear forces that had held for a quarter-century. Even more consequential for Europe was his violation of Russia’s commitment in the 1994 Budapest Memorandum to “respect the independence, sovereignty and existing borders of Ukraine.”

But, of course, Russia was not alone in complicating arms control progress:

- U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty in 2002 was a huge mistake.
- It is also regrettable that the U.S. encouraged Ukraine and Georgia to consider NATO membership since it was understandably viewed in Moscow as a provokatsia.
- And I believe that the U.S. badly mishandled evidence that Russia was violating the INF Treaty. Instead of employing the treaty’s proven mechanism to resolve compliance issues through expert discussions and on-site inspections, Washington simply sought to extract a confession from Moscow in high-level talks, while withholding (for intelligence reasons) the details of the incriminating evidence it had obtained and curtly dismissing compliance issues raised by Russia.

Given the U.S. reaction to Soviet ballistic missile defense investments in the 1960s, it’s ironic that the U.S. has been so insensitive to Moscow’s expressions of concern about the construction of a U.S. ballistic missile defense infrastructure in Eastern Europe.

The Aegis Ashore program to deploy SM3 interceptors in Romania and Poland was devised to protect the U.S. and Europe against ballistic missile attacks from the Middle East. The U.S. initially assessed that Iran could test ICBMs by 2015 and that such missiles could be armed by then with nuclear warheads. But when that year rolled around, Iran had demonstrated no interest in pursuing long-range missiles -- either ICBMs or even IRBMs. Moreover, Iran agreed to accept very stringent constraints on its ability to produce fissile material for warheads, along with unprecedented transparency measures.

And yet, the schedule for deploying the missiles in Poland to protect all of Europe against a threat that had never materialized was neither canceled nor postponed.

Meanwhile, Russia had raised concerns about the legality of the Mk-41 launchers used by these interceptors, in light of the launcher's use on warships to launch several different kinds of missiles, including the nuclear-armed Tomahawks that were the look-alike "cousins" of the Gryphon land-attack cruise missiles banned by the INF Treaty. Yet Washington curtly dismissed Russia's charges as propaganda.

For more than three years, Moscow denied U.S. assertions that Russia had an illicit system, claiming it didn't know what Washington was talking about. Finally, once the U.S. specified the missile's manufacturer and military designator, Russia acknowledged having the system but contended that the U.S. was mistaken about its range.

Both sides may have legitimate grievances, or at least plausible concerns, about actions taken by the other side. They should be energetically addressed by the treaty's Special Verification Commission. Instead, the dialogue to date seems to consist of trading accusations about the other side's treaty violations, while asserting that there is no basis for any suspicion of one's own activities. Neither side has proposed mutual on-site inspections by experts to determine the capabilities of the systems in question.

The Deep Cuts Commission -- a "Track 2" effort composed of US, Russian, and German security experts -- has been meeting for nearly five years to analyze challenges to nuclear arms control. The commission issued a statement November 15 with regard to INF Treaty compliance concerns, proposing that:

... both sides need to acknowledge the concerns of the other side and that Washington and Moscow should agree to reciprocal visits by experts to examine the missiles and the deployment sites in dispute. If the 9M729 missile is determined to have a range that exceeds 500 km, Russia could modify the missile to ensure it no longer violates the treaty or...halt production and eliminate any such missiles and [their] associated launchers.

For its part, the [U.S.] could modify its missile defense launchers to clearly distinguish them from the launchers used to fire offensive missiles from [U.S.] warships, or agree to transparency measures that give Russia confidence the launchers [ashore] cannot fire offensive missiles.

For decades, the INF Treaty has provided an important buttress for stability in Europe by constraining nuclear superpower arsenals. Moreover, the treaty framework could also provide a valuable foundation for addressing new challenges to stability in the sub-strategic category of nuclear systems. There is still a chance that further diplomatic efforts can save the treaty. We should all press hard toward this objective. If Moscow and Washington let it die, we will all soon regret it.

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